Marti Woods Summary Good

English 201 Analysis OK **83**

Dr. Bruce Magee Grammar Weak

# The feminism of Tom and the women of Uncle Toms Cabin

In the Heroines of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Elizabeth Ammons emphasis is centered on Tom and the feminism of his character. Uncle Tom’s character is gentle, kind, loves his wife and kids as well as his master, whom raised him. Ammons also states that the book was written to bring change and awareness to the treatment of the Negro slaves. As a Christian, Harriett Beecher Stowe believed this book was a supernatural inspiration from God and her duty to write. Ammons also states in the article, Harriett Beecher Stowe identified with the women in the story because she also had lost a child and knew what it felt like “to have a child torn away from you.” (Ammons 161).”The feminization of Tom was deliberate, states Ammons.

Stowe, was considered an activist, uses the women in her story to accomplish powerful works. The interference is constant in the book, eventually seeing many successes. Aunt Chloe deliberately holds up the family meal allowing Eliza time to escape. Mrs. Shelby makes a stand against slavery and Mr. Haley even though she is powerless to make a difference. She later releases Aunt Chloe to go and join her husband Tom. Mrs. Bird gave aid to Eliza and Henry by letting her husband know, she was a Christian and that regardless of the laws, they were going to help Eliza to escape, and they did.

Motherhood and the virtues of Mother’s, states Ammons, are the “real saviors of society . . . Her, femininity –true womanliness—means unshakable allegiance to the Christian virtues of faith, hope, charity, mercy, and self-sacrifice; purity in body and mind; ethical dependence more on emotion than on reason” (Ammons 164).

Throughout the article, Ammons compares both Tom and Eva as “Christ-like” characters. “Tom, meek like Christ” and Eva “feminine nurture: a type of love epitomized in the Christlike girl-child” (Ammons 164), or the “second Eve” (Ammons 165). The symbolism between Eva the little girl and Eve the mother of humanity is clearly the center of Ammons writings. She writes that both Tom and the Italian sailor look on Eva as the image of the child Jesus (Ammons 168). Ammon also states that Tom saw Eva’s face with the angels. Eva, at death tells Tom that she would die for the slaves if she could. Her love was sincere. Tom was the symbol of all things moral. He put the needs of others first, his needs or what was best for him, last.

Stowe wrote about the inhumane treatment of the slaves, “…particular emphasis on the horror suffered by the system’s maternal victims” (Ammons 167). A mother and son pulled apart and sold despite their pleas. The sleeping woman, whose baby was taken from her, jumps ship and drowns. A woman who lost all but one child in a slave sale, uses alcohol to suppress her loss and drunk, loses her last child. Cassy, the mistress and slave of Lagree gave her child an overdose to spare him a life of slavery. One of the saddest characters in the story was the slave girl, Topsy. She was beaten, staved, imprisoned until she was crippled psychologically (Ammons 167).

In summary, this article draws a correlation between Stowe and the Bible; that at times is validated and other times is a stretch. Ammons writes that Tom is the feminine heroine because he cried over his children, knowing he was to be sold and would not see them. He also witnessed a mother and child torn apart, which was agonizing for him to watch. Tom is a Christian and in the same circumstances any Christian or devoted father, that I know, would feel same. I do not see this as feminization of a man, but a man of God. Jesus tells us to love the children, does that make us feminine? I think that makes us human. Tom had a compassion for his people and strength that could only come from God. He naturally wanted to protect the weaker beings, Eva and the two slave women, and this shows extreme masculinity in him. Ammon goes on to say that Tom was soft for not beating his fellow slaves. I find this extremely courageous and in today’s society, this same character is depicted in the media as being a hero, not heroines. I was pleased to see that Ammon finally sums up the character of Tom as, “ … sensitivity and gentleness do not in her [Stowe] opinion make him a weak character. Instead, they combine with his traditionally attractive male strength and courage to create a morally superior and move loving than the average man . . .” (Ammons 175).

Finally, the article states Stowe wrote this book to change the way Americans see slavery. Stowe used her “Lowly feminine feeling [to] revolutionize man’s world” (Ammons 178). Maybe the reason Stowe found Tom feminine is that she “associated Christ with woman” (Ammons 178). The story was written from a woman’s prospective, a Christian woman. Christianity was what Stowe’s beliefs were founded on and therefore, I see the stories in the Bible coming out of her works. Ammons, though I did not agree with all of her conclusions, pointed out the value and power of motherhood and the driven woman.

# Bibliography

Ammons, Elizabeth. "Heroines in Uncle Tom's Cabin." *American Literature*, 49 (1977): 161-179.